

News Release



For Immediate Release

Date: April 23, 2013

**Embargoed until April 24,
2013 @ 1:00 p.m.**

Vicky Waters (916) 653-5115
vicky.waters@parks.ca.gov

2012 California State Parks Director's Recognition Awards Announced

SACRAMENTO – California State Parks Director, Major General Anthony L. Jackson, USMC (Ret.), presented today the 2012 Director's Recognition Awards. The awards go to Parks staff who distinguished themselves for their extraordinary achievements during the year.

"We want to recognize our public servants and partners who tirelessly devote themselves to our State Parks' mission," said Director Jackson. "The employees in this Department are by far the kind of hardworking individuals you find when people are dedicated to their mission. Those recognized today are a sampling of the fine employees that have made California State Parks one of the finest park systems anywhere in the world."

The awards are presented once a year. The honorees were selected by the Director from nominations submitted by the Department's employees from across the state. Among the award recipients are individuals who: recognized needs and found ways to meet those needs against the odds; identified long-standing problems and found creative solutions; and built unity among diverse groups, thus exceeding expectations.

Below is the list of honorees:

For energy efficient recreation –
California State Parks on the Internet: www.parks.ca.gov



The Olmsted Award for Leadership and Vision

Nina E. Gordon, Senior Policy Coordinator, Interpretation and Education (Retired) (Sacramento, Monterey, Santa Cruz and Yolo counties) led the way for thousands of people to enjoy the outdoors. She began her career in 1977 as a Park Aide, cleaning litter off the beach, working her way to becoming a State Park Peace Officer (Ranger). During 1980 to 1987, Nina initiated a system of wheelchair-accessible boardwalk trails over the sand dunes at Año Nuevo State Park. In recent years, Nina worked with a roundtable to create the “California Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights” and the “Children in Nature” program. She has motivated so many to be advocates for the protection of parks and resources and is honored for her achievements.

The Hill Award for Inspiration

James Pence, State Park Peace Officer/Ranger (Posthumous), (Sacramento, Sierra, Nevada, Amador, Placer, El Dorado, Alpine, and Mono counties) Officer James Pence was dedicated to the protection of the resources at each park he worked in. He arrived at Mono Lake State Natural Reserve in the Sierra District in 2006 and worked there as a Supervising State Park Ranger until his sudden and unexpected death in September 2012 at the age of 49. James was a steadfast leader and an inspiration to many people throughout California for more than 20 years. Throughout his career, James converted people to be park lovers and stewards. His persistence and guidance insured protection of natural and cultural resources, which at times brought personal attacks which he stoically endured with professionalism. Mr. Pence will be remembered for his positive impact on California, his great attitude and awesome inspiration, and his amazing versatility.

The Drury Award for Professional Integrity (two winners for 2012)

James Andrew Luscutoff, Chief, Concessions, Reservations and Fees Division, (Retired); (Sacramento County) In a career spanning 42 years, Jim worked tirelessly to keep California State Parks concessions projects on track. He efficiently managed his Division and coordinated with the entire Department for concessions contracts. Jim was clear that concessions need to be compatible with the mission, public interest, and operational needs.

The concessions program generated more than \$100 million annually in gross sales and \$10 million revenue to State Parks. He showed great professional integrity in his skillful way of conducting business negotiations for California State Parks. Jim started his career in the Reservations Office and eventually helped developed a complex web-based system handling more than 400,000 camping reservations and 700,000 in ticket sales to Hearst Castle each year.

Drury Award for Professional Integrity

Timothy Guardino, State Park Peace Officer/Ranger, (Posthumous), (Sacramento, El Dorado, Sierra, Mono, Auburn, Folsom and Elk Grove counties) was a model employee for the Department since 2003. Tragically, Tim passed away on October 14, 2012, after a three-year battle with Lou Gehrig's disease. Tim's professionalism and strong moral compass embodied the term integrity. Officer Guardino facilitated the development of a new statewide law enforcement training course to provide improved customer service to the State's Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) recreationists; and created a better understanding of OHV laws through education. Tim's commitment to State Parks and customer service was demonstrated while he was courageously battling against Lou Gehrig's disease. When Tim was too weak to use a keyboard anymore, he utilized a voice-activated typing program to be able to continue his work answering public questions and providing stellar customer service.

The Mott Award for Innovation

Charles (Chuck) Combs, Staff Park & Recreation Specialist, (Monterey, Santa Cruz, Sacramento, Los Angeles, and San Diego counties) started his parks career more than 38 years ago as a Park Aide at the age of 18. In 2000, Mr. Combs moved through the park maintenance ranks and became head of maintenance training at the William Penn Mott Jr. Training Center. Chuck realized that no other park agency offered training in trade skills vital to good maintenance practices, and worked with the National Park Service, the California Conservation Corps, Bureau of Land Management, county and city parks districts, and other agencies to develop specific trainings. California State Park's

excellent reputation for courses became widely known across the United States. Chuck was the catalyst for thousands of people being properly trained and becoming competent in their careers, resulting in improved maintenance and preservation of state, local and national parks throughout the U.S.

The Dewitt Award for Partnership (Two Award Winners)

Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods (Sacramento, San Francisco, Marin, San Mateo, Sonoma, Contra Costa, Monterey, Santa Cruz, Humboldt, Del Norte, Trinity, and Mendocino counties.) Accepting the award is Michele Luna, Executive Director of the non-profit interpretive organization founded to promote education, preservation, and restoration of the natural and cultural resources of the Russian River area through interpretation and stewardship. Ms. Luna, leader since 1994, spearheaded volunteers who have given more than 30,000 hours a year in time; raised a total of \$1.2 million for the Willow Creek Bridge project, and performed many other tasks in support of State Parks. The Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods' contributions to the mission of California State Parks earn them the honor of being recognized with the Dewitt Award for Partnership

- AND -

Central Coast Lighthouse Keepers (CCLK) Cooperating Association, (Sacramento, San Francisco, Marin, San Mateo, Sonoma, Contra Costa, Monterey, Santa Cruz, Humboldt, Del Norte, Trinity, Mendocino, San Diego, Santa Cruz, Humboldt, Del Norte, Siskiyou counties). Accepted by John O'Neil, Chairman; and Point Sur State Historic Park Volunteers, 2012 Chairman Kevin Hanstick. For 20 years, the CCLK Cooperating Association and the Point Sur volunteers have been instrumental in their dedication to provide financial and volunteer support. During 2012, the volunteers contributed 15,300 hours of service and the docents conducted 276 tours for 6,000 visitors at Point Sur State Historic Park. It is estimated that over the years, the CCLK has contributed more than \$1.5 million towards restoration work at the park. The excellent partnerships with these organizations have ensured preservation and enjoyment for many visitors for years to come.

The Ingenuity Award

Communications Cell Connectivity Project at the Mojave Sector in the Tehachapi District (Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, Kern, San Bernardino, and Los Angeles counties.)

The outstanding achievement in bringing cell phone connectivity to the remote Red Rock Canyon State Park was led by **Matthew E. Williams, State Park Peace Officer/Ranger, Russ Dingman, Staff Park and Recreation Specialist, and John Aiton, Park Maintenance Worker I**. Their efforts resulted in future information technology capabilities and current cell phone communications for the staff and public. Importantly, they added critical 911 accesses within the park. This cell phone access has the potential to save lives as well as time and money for the Department staff and visitors.

Special Act/Special Service

Evan S. Walter, State Park Peace Officer/Ranger, Northern Buttes District (Sacramento, Glenn, Colusa, Butte, Yuba, and Sutter counties) responded quickly to a dangerous situation at a Chico shopping mall in Northern California. While off duty on November 1, 2012, Evan Walter was the first responder and intervened when a 15-year-old male was being repeatedly stabbed in the back and side areas by a suspected gang member. He was able to take the suspect into custody prior to other officers' arrival. The victim was in serious condition but did survive.

Special Commendations (7)

Sharon Dennis, Associate Government Program Analyst, Administration Division, (Sacramento County) is recognized for establishing an ethical, accountable program to recycle old Department computers to get them into the hands of needy children and school systems.

Gilbert (Gil) Hernandez, Park Maintenance Worker II, Angeles District (Los Angeles County) is thanked for protecting and preserving parks in the Angeles District for more than 35 years, and for recently helping with the Los Angeles State Historic Park event activities. Throughout the years, through fires, earthquakes, floods, and even the Rodney King riots, he

protected structures, residences, and property that belong to the State Park System and the people of California.

Tara Elizabeth Lynch, Senior Staff Counsel, Legal Office (Sacramento County)

contributed significantly during 2012 by maintaining a well-respected and highly functioning Legal Office during the recent times of public pressure and limited staff resources. She stepped up to act as Chief Counsel and her legal prowess, integrity, and friendly attitude provided the needed assistance to successfully support the mission of California State Parks.

Cameron M. Morrison, State Park Peace Officer/Ranger, Diablo Vista District, (Marin, San Francisco, Contra Costa, Alameda, San Mateo, Napa, and Sacramento counties) worked above and beyond “typical” Ranger duties by taking on many extra tasks and projects in the parks. For more than ten years, he has been stalwart and instrumental in the area of resource protection in a very large park area, and his efforts have been lauded by public and coworkers alike.

James D. Valdez, State Park Peace Officer/Ranger, Angeles District (Los Angeles County), spearheaded the special-event programs within the Los Angeles State Historic Park which has become a premier location for large-scale music festivals and cultural events. The events inspire the public to learn more about their history while enjoying festivities. James built the program with little experience and no blueprint. Today, people are experiencing high-quality, outdoor recreation in a California State Park, in the center of a large city – quite a modern-day accomplishment.

Linda K. Walton, Museum Curator I, Archaeology, History and Museums Division (Sacramento County) had no prior experience in conducting museum-collection inventories in the field, yet she coordinated artifact inventories for the California State Park System. She enthusiastically provided justification and was able to secure funding for museum collections that shall continue to be properly preserved for the people of California.

Robin Joy Wellman, State Park Interpreter, Russian River District (Sacramento, Marin, Sonoma, San Francisco, Lake, Mendocino and Humboldt Counties) planned a series of events for the Fort Ross State Historic Park Bicentennial Year Celebration – one of the biggest events held within that area. She worked with Russian diplomats and delegates in order to tell their story too. One two-day event received more than 6,000 visitors to the Northern California coastal-treasure fortress. Appreciation for her passion to Fort Ross extended across the seas to Russian peoples.

The Awards Ceremony takes place on Wednesday, April 24, 2013 at 1:00 p.m. in the Resources Agency Auditorium at 1416 9th Street, Sacramento, CA.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS AND THEIR LOCATIONS, VISIT WWW.PARKS.CA.GOV .